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New York

President: Mr. Razali Ismail ..... (Malaysia)

In the absence of the President, Mr. Fernández Estigarribia (Paraguay), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

Agenda item 33 (*continued*)

The situation in the Middle East

Reports of the Secretary-General (A/51/543, A/51/678)

Draft resolutions (A/51/L.38, L.39, L.40)

Mr. Abu-Nimah (Jordan) (*interpretation from Arabic*): The question of the Middle East, at the core of which is the question of Palestine, remains an important standing item on the agenda of this Organization. We had believed — indeed, we had hoped — that more progress would have been made along the path to peace five years after the start of the peace process in Madrid. However, witnessing the stalemate that has beset the peace process, we must express clearly our extreme concern and sound a strong and sincere warning of the dangerous results for the whole region. Nevertheless, this does not affect our belief in peace or our constant commitment to move along the path of peace no matter what the obstacles. We would like to note here the positive commitment of other parties to the peace process.

In participating in the discussion of this item, my delegation proceeds from its belief in the essential role of the United Nations in the peace process and in the need to reactivate this role to support the constant efforts made by the sponsors of the peace process and other parties concerned. It is also necessary to reactivate the peace process to support the current endeavours to extricate it from the dilemma that has impeded and paralysed it.

The United Nations is the foundation of international legitimacy. It embodies the collective conscience of all peoples of the Earth, and all the resolutions that contain the principles constituting the bases for the settlement of the question of Palestine and the Middle East were adopted within its framework. The clearest example of this is Security Council resolution 242 (1967), the cornerstone of the current peace process. With it, the door of peace was opened in 1967, and its implementation, in letter and spirit, on all tracks, along with the realization of the inalienable political and national rights of the Palestinian people and the complete withdrawal from the Arab territories occupied by Israel in 1967, will lead to the desired peace.

The question of the Middle East peace process has pride of place in the agenda and the concerns of my country. Jordan's contributions since 1948 in this regard are well known. In its international relations, Jordan's approach follows the spirit of the principles of the Charter, which means that Jordan believes in the peaceful settlement of all international questions in all circumstances. As soon as we saw genuine signs that the

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conflict in the Middle East was being addressed, Jordan hastened to promote the success of the historic opportunity that arose, in Madrid, for the first time in the history of this question. Jordan did so with the same positive spirit and realism that it has evinced towards all endeavours to achieve the peaceful settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict on the basis of justice, legitimacy, United Nations resolutions and international law.

Jordan's understanding of peace is that it must be just, comprehensive and lasting, which is also the understanding expressed by most international parties directly concerned with question of the Middle East. Our commitment to peace within this understanding is a strategic and principled one, and stems from our conviction that this peace is essential for all the countries and peoples of the region. Once it is achieved, it will constitute a turning point in the history of the region and a path towards new horizons of stability, security and peaceful coexistence for all, both Arabs and Israelis, who will enjoy the normal life they have been deprived of for nearly six decades.

On the basis of our commitment to peace, we signed a Peace Treaty with Israel in the autumn of 1994 that brought new good-neighbourly relations between the two countries and set out the bases and the principles for their cooperation in various fields. This Treaty constituted an important contribution on the road to achieving the comprehensive peace desired by all parties and the international community, in particular as it came about after the achievement of peace with the great sisterly country of Egypt and the progress made on the Israeli-Palestinian track with the signing of the Oslo agreement. There was great hope that this would be followed by progress on the Syrian and Lebanese tracks with Israel in order to achieve a comprehensive peace and to start the process of economic reconstruction and development in the region as a whole. Unfortunately, this has not happened.

On the basis of the foregoing, we believe it has become necessary to consider seriously and objectively the causes of the impediments to progress. We call upon all parties participating in the peace process to continue their efforts in order to extricate the process from the dilemma that has brought it to a halt, because the responsibility for establishing a comprehensive peace and seeing it through to the end is a collective and common responsibility. However, that does not mean that all parties bear equal responsibility for impeding progress and for the non-implementation of agreements reached.

Through our commitment to peace and our keen interest in consolidating the gains made towards peace, and on the basis of our commitment to the principles on which the Israeli-Jordanian Peace Treaty is based, it is our duty to say honestly to Israel that we have only one path before us, and we must either continue along the path of peace or push the region back into the abyss of violence, confrontation and extremism.

The new Government of Israel is correct to invoke the slogan of security. Security is indeed one of the most important objectives of the peace we are trying to achieve for all the countries and peoples of the region. However, security cannot be achieved by refraining from the implementation of agreements between Israel and the Palestinians. What is happening in Hebron is a case in point.

Security cannot be achieved by stepping up practices that harm the Palestinians, their rights and their hopes. Security cannot be achieved with the continuation of Israeli settlement activities in the occupied Arab territories, whether by expansion of existing settlements or construction of new ones, which amount to the same thing.

Security cannot be achieved with the continuation of the policy of confiscation of land, demolition of homes, withdrawal of identity cards, isolation of Jerusalem from the rest of the West Bank, restriction of the movements of Palestinians, keeping thousands of Palestinians in prison and allowing Israeli security forces to use physical violence, which is to say torture, during the interrogation of suspects. This runs counter to all the most basic rules of respect for human rights and justice and is unequivocally rejected and condemned by the civilized world.

Last week we saw tragic scenes on television of what happens to Palestinian workers detained by Israeli soldiers. They were kicked and humiliated physically and psychologically. We are horrified at these repeated practices and their effect on the feelings of the people under occupation. Such practices deepen wounds and plunge the region back into the atmosphere of conflict, enmity and bitterness that we thought we had left behind us.

The peace process is based on clear principles, the most important of which is the land-for-peace formula. This principle was contained in Security Council resolution 242 (1967), which declares the inadmissibility

of the occupation by force of the territory of others. This is one of the bases of the peace process.

The peace we seek to achieve is a just, comprehensive and lasting one. How can justice be had if land is not given back to its legitimate owners? How can land be returned to its legitimate owners if settlement continues? How can we be convinced that this is the ultimate objective when Israel continues to issue clear, formal declarations affirming the continuation of the settlement policy and the lack of any intention to abandon it, even within the framework of peace?

The latest declaration by the Israeli Prime Minister, two days ago — that the Jordan Valley is a permanent part of the land of Israel and that it will continue to be, whatever the final settlement — was a dangerous act of escalation that runs counter to the commitments, needs, principles and the very idea of peace. Peace cannot be achieved by reaffirming and consolidating the causes of conflict, but rather by eliminating them. It cannot be achieved by swallowing up land through expansion and denying the rights of the other party.

Such declarations undermine our aim to create an atmosphere of trust so that the peace process can flourish and so that the peoples of the region can transcend the wounds and tragedies of the past and move towards a future of cooperation, reconciliation and hope.

The Israeli-Palestinian Agreement approved the deferral of such questions as those of settlements, Jerusalem and refugees to the final status negotiations in order to provide a smooth beginning for the peace process. It is natural that such things should be left unchanged until the time for negotiating on them. It is inconceivable that the deferral should be an opportunity to change the facts on the ground in favour of the occupier, thereby making solutions more difficult and more complex.

On the basis of the foregoing, we believe that it has become necessary to put all the deferred questions on the agenda of the negotiations and to deal with them seriously, objectively and with a genuine will to arrive at acceptable, legal and just solutions that would make peace for the peoples of the region an acceptable option that deserves support so that we may reach the lasting peace we desire.

We believe that this is the correct way towards peace and that the solution of the deferred problems, such as the questions of the refugees, Jerusalem, sovereignty and self-determination of the Palestinian people, is the only guarantee for security, stability and progress for all the peoples of the region, Arab and Israeli alike.

This comprehensive approach calls for moving ahead in the negotiations on the Lebanese and Israeli tracks, starting from where they left off, in order to achieve the desired and necessary settlement on the basis of the Madrid formula and the resolutions of the Security Council, particularly resolutions 242 (1967) and 425 (1978). Progress towards peace and the achievement of peace is the surest guarantee for stopping extremism and violence.

The question of Jerusalem is the crux of peace. We must inevitably arrive at a just and balanced solution to it. There is a clear consensus on all international, legal and political levels that East Jerusalem is an integral part of the West Bank, which has been occupied since 1967. Therefore, it is subject to the provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention and Security Council resolutions.

The Security Council has paid special attention to Jerusalem since the beginning of the Israeli occupation and adopted resolution 252 (1968), which rejected all Israeli actions and legislation aimed at changing the character of this Holy City or its demographic composition.

Security Council resolution 476 (1980) clearly stated that there is a need to end the Israeli occupation of Arab territories occupied in 1967, including the city of Jerusalem. Security Council resolution 478 (1980), which calls upon States not to transfer their diplomatic missions to the city of Jerusalem, is the clearest example of the firm international position of rejecting Israel's annexation of this city, which runs counter to principles of international law, and Jerusalem, as an occupied territory, is subject to the rules of international legality.

I referred earlier to the fact that the Israeli-Palestinian Agreement had approved the deferral of the consideration of the question of Jerusalem to the final status negotiations in view of the sensitive nature of the question. Therefore, any action taken by Israel since the beginning of the Madrid process to alter the political, legal or demographic status of Jerusalem is tantamount to creating a *fait accompli* to be imposed on the Arab party, which would constitute a judgement on the status of the Holy City before the beginning of the final status negotiations. This is unacceptable and cannot be conducive to the peace we all desire. Nor is it favourable

to all the peoples of the region and their hope for a common future of stability, cooperation and respect.

We followed with sadness and concern the acts of bloody violence that took a toll of more than 70 Palestinians and 20 Israelis after the Government of Israel opened a tunnel in the area of the Al-Aqsa Mosque in East Jerusalem, in total disregard not only of established rights and contractual obligations, but also of the feelings of the whole Arab and Islamic world.

We must reaffirm, therefore, that the deferral of the consideration of the question of Jerusalem means that its status must be maintained. Thus the Government of Jordan, in order to maintain the Holy City's special religious, cultural and historic character, has taken a strong interest in continuing its custodianship of the holy places so as to protect them from all dangers until the desired final status is achieved.

We believe that the international community has a great responsibility to move the peace process forward and to ensure its success. While it is the people who are the basis of peace, they do not confine themselves to an abstract vision of it; they also perceive peace by its results. My country looks forward to a wider and deeper international understanding of the financial, developmental and economic needs of the peoples and countries of the region. In this connection, we attach great importance to the role of the economic summit conferences held at Casablanca, Amman and, most recently, at Cairo in continuing and supporting regional development.

While we are encouraged by the success of those conferences, we have noticed the repercussions that the interruption of the peace process has had on the conference hosted by our sister country Egypt last November. Many of the countries participating in that conference expressed the need for political progress in order to ensure economic and developmental success. We believe, therefore, that the United Nations, which represents international legitimacy, must play a vital role in moving the peace process forward and in supporting the efforts of the sponsors of the peace process.

We also believe it is useful and necessary to combine the efforts of the European Union with those of the sponsors of the peace process, with the goal of mobilizing the requisite goodwill in all areas in order to promote the peace process and provide the elements for its success. Particularly important are the efforts made by the member States of the European Union since the beginning of the peace process and the ongoing ones aimed at contributing to the process of economic development.

Mr. Park (Republic of Korea): We all know that the past year has been a particularly trying time for the Middle East peace process. Although 1996 began on a promising note with the peaceful and democratic general elections held in Palestine on 20 January, a series of devastating terrorist attacks against Israel in late February and early March quickly enveloped the spirit of optimism surrounding the peace process in a sombre and cynical cloud.

Fully recognizing the irrevocable damage that terrorism can wreak on the peace process, the international community came together on 13 March at the Summit of Peacemakers in Sharm El Sheikh resolutely to denounce the violence. Even prior to the Summit, the world community echoed its firm support for the Middle East peace process by holding a conference on assistance to the Palestinians at Paris in January, at which the Republic of Korea announced its decision to provide further aid of $3 million, in addition to an earlier provision of $12 million earmarked for Palestinian rehabilitation projects.

Despite calls for reconciliation and peace by the outside world, the reality of the Middle East has shown little improvement. Israel's response to the terrorist attacks, which included the closure of its borders with the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, has led to further socio-economic hardship for the Palestinian people, and, unfortunately, has also deepened the distrust between the two sides. Most recently, in September, there was an eruption of large-scale clashes — arguably the worst since the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements of 1993 — which stemmed from the Israeli decision to open a new entrance to a tunnel running under a major religious site in Jerusalem.

It is not only the Israeli-Palestinian track that has suffered major setbacks. In April, significant upheaval occurred along the Israel-Lebanon border, and Israel and Syria have not made much headway either on the issues related to the Golan Heights. The lack of progress in those areas is of great concern since the Middle East peace process can be successful only if there is progress on each track, in keeping with the approach envisioned at the Madrid Peace Conference.

Despite the obstacles that threaten to unravel the peace process, we cannot simply throw up our hands in

frustration, as the implications of the enduring conflict in the Middle East, in both political and economic terms, are too overwhelming. In the final analysis, the problems that plague the peace process, insurmountable as they may seem, are man-made and thus can be worked out through the resolve and commitment of man.

Indeed, history shows us that no great milestone has ever been achieved without tremendous hardship, trials and perseverance. My delegation wishes to remind the parties concerned of this simple truth, which, amid the dramatic ups and downs experienced recently, may inspire them to sustain their fortitude and long-term vision so that Arab-Israeli relations may improve and progress be made towards a peaceful reconciliation.

Do international relations sway domestic politics, or are they influenced by them? The answer to that question, in both the theory and practice of diplomacy, has always been elusive. The situation in the Middle East, however, is a clear-cut example of how domestic decisions can spill over into the international realm.

My delegation has no intention of engaging in a discussion on the particular policy choices of a Member State. What we do wish to stress is that the parties directly affected by the Middle East peace process have the full power to map out its destiny, a situation markedly different from that of the cold war years, when the pressure of outside Powers had more of an impact on regional politics. In today's setting, the judgment of the parties directly concerned — the clarity of their perceptions and the appropriateness of their decisions — will be the sole determinant of the nature of the environment in which they and future generations will live.

Indeed, every effort must be made to avert the realization of the admonition made by President Mubarak during the Middle East/North African Economic Conference held at Cairo last month, that it might be said

> "centuries from today, that our countries had peace within their grasp and squandered it". (*The New York Times, 13 November 1996, p. 9*)

We therefore urge all the parties directly concerned to transcend their short-term, myopic interests and, by extinguishing distrust and rekindling the peace process, to look to the horizon towards the greater and nobler goals of reconciliation and common prosperity.

In closing, I should like to say that if one examines the plight of the Middle East and that of the Korean peninsula, a few key parallels can be drawn. But what stands out most conspicuously is the fact that the two situations require the staunch political will of the parties directly concerned if a peaceful settlement is to be reached.

The international community has undertaken a number of commendable initiatives to facilitate the peace process. Beyond these diplomatic efforts at the international level, however, the most critical requirement is for the parties directly concerned to bridge the political chasm by engaging in candid and open-minded dialogue. We are confident that the same initiative, determination and courage that the parties demonstrated in forging a historical framework for the peace and stability of the region can likewise be invoked to pave a new avenue built upon cooperation and coexistence that will eventually lead to a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the region based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978).

Mr. Moubarak (Lebanon) (*interpretation from Arabic*): At the outset, I should like to say that Lebanon is one of the countries that has suffered most from the Arab-Israeli conflict. We believe that we have much to gain if we can achieve a comprehensive, just and lasting peace — a peace that all in our region are working towards — in accordance with Security Council resolutions 242 (1968), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978). My delegation would again like to reiterate its commitment to the peace process that began in Madrid in 1991. We had accepted at that time the initiative of the sponsors — the United States and the Russian Federation — on the basis of Security Council resolution 425 (1978). For 18 years, however, Israel has refused to implement that resolution, and continues to occupy part of southern Lebanon and daily to attack innocent people there. Lebanon is still demanding the implementation of Security Council resolution 425 (1978), which reaffirms the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Lebanon, and requests that Israel withdraw from Lebanon back to internationally recognized borders.

Here, I should like to make clear once again the position of my country. Lebanon categorically rejects any proposal — old or new — that would separate the Lebanese and Syrian tracks in the negotiations. We reiterate our absolute rejection of any suspect proposals for Lebanon, such as those we have learned about through the media. That would represent an attempt to

breathe new life into the agreement of 17 May, of which we reject both the spirit and letter. We reaffirm our commitment to complete solidarity and full, unswerving cooperation with Syria in the pursuit of our shared destiny. It is no secret that the Lebanese and Syrian tracks are of strategic importance and crucial to the success of the peace talks. If this basic truth is not properly understood, the situation will continue to worsen.

Peace in the region will never be established as long as Israel continues to refuse to discharge its obligations under international law, the principles agreed at Madrid, and the principle of land for peace, specifically withdrawal from occupied Arab territories. That would include withdrawal from Lebanon back to internationally recognized borders, pursuant to Security Council resolution 425 (1978), as well as from the Golan back to the lines of 4 July 1967, in accordance with Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973).

Israel's occupation of southern Lebanon since 1978 has caused destruction and tragedy in my country. Neither the invasion of 1978, which was known as the Litani operation, nor the subsequent one in 1982 — the so-called Galilee operation — has guaranteed security for Israel. In fact, they resulted in further complications and considerable suffering for all concerned. The continuing violence in southern Lebanon has once again proved the complete failure of the idea of the so-called security region established by Israel. Likewise, the numerous attacks launched daily by Israel in the north of that region unambiguously indicate the failure of the whole concept.

The Assembly will no doubt recall the aggression perpetrated last April by Israel against Lebanon — the so-called Grapes of Wrath operation — which affected dozens of villages in southern Lebanon key installations throughout Lebanese territory. All of us will have seen on television images of villages that were destroyed. We saw thousands of innocent civilians fleeing before the bombardment by Israel's Air Force, warships and tanks, which spared no one. They even targeted civilian automobiles, regardless of the direction they were headed in. Public opinion was shocked to see the bombing of an ambulance that was carrying children. Houses were destroyed with their inhabitants still inside them, and innocent people were buried under the debris of their homes.

The international conscience was sharply moved when the Israelis bombed the United Nations position in Qana, and the remains of more than 110 people were scattered about, including women and children who had sought shelter at that camp in the belief that, by seeking refuge with those responsible for international peace and security, they would be protected from the destructive power of the "Grapes of Wrath".

The Assembly will recall that the General Assembly condemned Israel's aggressive acts against Lebanon. The Commission on Human Rights, which adopted several resolutions on the human rights situation in southern Lebanon, has clearly reiterated the fact that Israel had violated the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as well as the Geneva Convention of 12 August 1949 relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War. Its actions were also in violation of the Hague Convention of 1907. Lebanese detainees are still living in concentration camps run by Israel in southern Lebanon, in particular in the Al Khiyam camp, and are suffering intensely as a result. We demand once again their immediate release.

Operation Grapes of Wrath showed the true face of Israel, which continues flagrantly to violate all the norms of morality and international law, and it also revealed Israel's animosity and warlike intentions towards the people of the region.

Israel has not yet understood that fire and sword cannot lead to peace. We have repeated in the Security Council that such a policy will only cause death and destruction and lead to the disgrace and fall from power of those who perpetrate it. We reaffirm the necessity of implementing Security Council resolution 425 (1978), which alone can guarantee a return to calm and stability in southern Lebanon. We repeat that our people are entitled to resist Israeli occupation in the southern parts of our country and in the Bekaa-West region. This right is based on international law and on the dozens of resolutions and declarations adopted by international bodies, including the Declaration on the Occasion of the Fiftieth Anniversary of the United Nations, which was adopted with the participation of more than 130 Heads of State or Government. Our people are simply exercising their innate right to free their territory from Israeli occupation, which, in the view of international law, is undoubtedly the worst form of terrorism.

It is clear that despite all this destruction and death, the hatred of extremists and of the enemies of the peace process has not diminished. The "Grapes of Wrath" Government has been replaced by a new one, which is not afraid to say that it is against peace, against the Madrid peace process. The new Israeli Government has

also said no to the Madrid principles. It has said no to the exchange of land for peace and to a return to the table to resume the negotiations where they were left off during the previous Israeli Administration. It has said no to fulfilling the commitments entered into by the previous Government. It has said yes to the construction of dozens of new settlements in the Golan and the West Bank, yes to the enlargement of dozens of existing settlements, yes to the confiscation of other lands belonging to the Arabs of the occupied territories, yes to the complete obliteration of the Arab identity of Al-Quds, yes to the multiplication of threats and shows of force, and yes to the escalation of tension.

This is an irresponsible Government, which speaks the language of violence, excessive settlement, expansion and the refusal to compromise, instead of the language of peace and reconciliation. Each day brings new proof of this Government's zeal for threats, arbitrary acts and incessant violations of the Geneva Conventions, in particular the fourth Geneva Convention, and the norms of international law. Israel seems to be entirely indifferent to all this; it even tries to convince the world that a telephone call to an Arab leader or uttering the word "peace" is some sort of evidence of its desire for peace.

Enough is enough. No one can any longer be misled by such words. We must make the leaders in Tel Aviv realize that the world will reject the drums of war, that the world would like the negotiations to be resumed where they stopped, in accordance with the principle of land for peace and the Madrid accords. Here we would like to reiterate that the multilateral negotiations will never succeed so long as Israel does not withdraw from the occupied Arab territories. It is pointless to continue to make a huge fuss to give the impression that the peace process is advancing while Israel continues to reject international legality and the Madrid principles. We are completely convinced that the multilateral talks which have taken place to date were premature and will come to naught so long as the bilateral tracks do not achieve their expected results in accordance with international resolutions and the Madrid principles.

We believe that the Security Council is the embodiment of international political authority and has the responsibility to protect States against aggression and to assure the implementation of its resolutions. We also believe that holding meetings of the Security Council whenever necessary to consider the question of Israeli aggression against southern Lebanon can only strengthen the peace process in the Middle East rather than the opposite.

Regarding the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), we believe that it plays an important central role in the implementation of Security Council resolution 425 (1978). That is why we once again ask that UNIFIL be kept in place in its present form so that it can fulfil its mandate and play the important role it has been given. We would like to take this opportunity to commend the officers and personnel of the Force for the efforts they have made since 1978. Likewise, we would like to express our profound gratitude to the States that contribute contingents to UNIFIL.

I would like to reiterate Lebanon's commitment to meeting the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people and to fulfilling their rights to self-determination and to the creation of their own State. We call for the full implementation of resolution 194 (III), which unambiguously reaffirms the right to the Palestinians to return to their homes.

Lebanon rejects unequivocally all attempts to resettle on our territory the Palestinians who are there now. This position was set out clearly in the Lebanese Constitution, in accordance with the 1989 Taif Agreement. It represents the national consensus of the Lebanese.

As far as Al-Quds is concerned, we reaffirm that Israel's decision to impose its laws and its administration on the Holy City of Al-Quds is illegal, and therefore null and void. In this connection, this truth has been confirmed in several Security Council and the General Assembly resolutions, notably Security Council resolutions 252 (1968), 267 (1969), 271 (1969), 298 (1971) and 476 (1980).

We say to those who look at the problem of Al-Quds from a subjective angle that Jerusalem is at the heart of the Palestinian question. We cannot accept any measures which affect the Holy City, its people and its land. The Arab inhabitants of Jerusalem have been subjected to all sorts of harassment and pressure aimed at forcing them to leave, which would distort the demographic and social status of Al-Quds. We call attention to the threat posed by the conducting of searches in the vicinity of the Al-Aqsa Mosque and at the other Holy Places most cherished by Christians and Muslims.

We also condemn the fact that some States have returned their diplomatic missions to Al-Quds, in violation of Security Council resolution 478 (1980). We would urge States to respect the relevant resolutions of the United Nations, in accordance with the Charter.

The Comprehensive Test-Ban Treaty cannot be relevant to our region so long as Israel refuses to accede to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and continues to threaten the region with its nuclear arsenals, defying international law and the resolutions of the United Nations and its specialized agencies. Israel must fully and unequivocally respect the will of the international community, as enshrined in the international law and in the relevant resolutions of the Security Council. Only in this way can we achieve a just, comprehensive and lasting peace in the region. All we want is peace and prosperity, but only on the basis of the Madrid principles, international law and the principle of the return of land for peace.

Lebanon suffered through a 17-year war that ended only five years ago. We aspire to rebuilding our country and to providing a better and more prosperous future for our children. This will be possible only when a just comprehensive and lasting peace is established in the region, in accordance with international law and the Charter and resolutions of the United Nations.

The current deplorable state of the peace process will prevail as long as Israel continues to behave irresponsibly. Israel continues to undermine the peace process and its behaviour will have dangerous consequences not only for the parties to the conflict, but for the entire international community. It is high time that Israel understood that peace cannot be restored unless we recover all of our territory. We call upon the sponsors of the peace process to rectify these matters before it is too late.

Mr. Wehbe (Syrian Arab Republic) (*interpretation from Arabic*): I would like to extend my sincerest thanks to the President for giving me the opportunity to speak before the General Assembly on the situation in the Middle East.

The graph of events in the Middle East reveals a situation of grave deterioration, tension and increasing international concern over the peace process. Anyone who listens to the declarations of the responsible Israeli officers or of the Israel Government since it took power will find that they take every opportunity to affirm their intransigence their desire to alter the foundation of the peace process and to restart the peace talks from scratch, and their refusal to build on what was achieved during the talks that took place under the previous Israeli Government.

The current Israeli Government has denied the principle of "land for peace", replacing it with a formula of "peace for peace" and thus imposing a *fait accompli* on the Arabs. Here, we must state once again that the peace process began with a fundamental agreement, the Madrid framework, the core of which was the principle of the return of land for peace, as well as Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978). Annexes to this initiative were agreed upon in the course of lengthy discussions between the United States, the Arab parties and Israel. The end result was the approval of these annexes, which have played a very important role as parameters of the peace process and contributed to relaunching this process.

Indeed, on the basis of that framework and those annexes, the discussions and activities of Arab and Israeli representatives were resumed, first in Madrid, then in Washington. By virtue of persistent efforts on the part of the concerned parties, a number of agreements were reached, establishing the rights and obligations of the parties. Within the framework of these commitments, it was agreed between Syria and Israel that Israel would withdraw from the Syrian Golan to the line of 4 June 1967. Negotiations continued on the other elements of peace under the supervision and with the knowledge of the United States.

The current turn of events in the Middle East began with the new Israeli Government, which brought with it the three "no"s: no to withdrawal from the Golan; no to withdrawal from the occupied Palestinian territories; and no to a Palestinian State. Israel made declarations stating that it wanted to start negotiations from square one without any preconditions, but that this would mean abandoning the Madrid framework, which in its essence is based on the principle of land for peace. The graph will thus continue its downward trend, following the direction of the bloody confrontations that erupted when Israel opened the entrance to the tunnel under the Al-Aqsa Mosque. This trend was preceded by premeditated Israeli provocations and an unwarranted escalation against Syria, and continued with attacks against southern Lebanon and its western Bekaa. Additional provocations by Israel included allegations and campaigns against Syrian training contingents, which, as we have said before, were operating within the framework of a precautionary defensive training programme.

It is equally strange how Israel attempts to delude world public opinion, claiming itself to be a highly vulnerable target. These ploys have become well known to the entire world, which is well aware that Israel is the largest military Power of the region and owns the most

sophisticated weaponry, particularly weapons of mass destruction, and first and foremost nuclear weapons.

Everyone knows that Israel is the one and only country in the region that has not acceded to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons or to the full-scope safeguards of the International Atomic Energy Agency.

Israel is acquiring weapons and filling its arsenals to the brim. Could Israel — joined as it is in a strategic coalition with the United States and manufacturing a wide variety of weapons, from tanks and rockets to the most deadly weapon of mass destruction, the nuclear weapon — really be afraid of the Syrian contingent, which is an ordinary regular preventive defence force? Israel cannot possibly fear the Syrian contingent, given that, whenever Israel plans a military attack against Syria or Lebanon, or to acquire additional American weaponry, or to strike a blow against the peace process, it resorts to fabricating such allegations to justify its position and to escalate the military situation, believing that Syria and the Arab side will accept its conditions, which are based on the principle of peace for peace.

Not content with striking one blow after the other against the peace process, the Israeli Government has also persisted in nurturing extremists. The spokesman for the Prime Minister of Israel has declared that his Government is devising plans and programmes to build 900 new housing units for settlers, while three new settlements have been recommended for the Syrian Golan by the Minister for Energy and Infrastructure. The Israeli Government has also decided to expand its settlements in the West Bank, in occupied Arab Jerusalem and in the Gaza sector, in defiance of international law, legally binding international resolutions and the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949, thereby increasing tensions in the region and encouraging further violence. Syria, condemns Israel's settlement policies and activities, whether they call for building new settlements or expanding the present settlements, which is no less dangerous than building settlements, since it entails the annexation of additional occupied Arab land. Syria also considers such procedures and practices to be nothing less than additional attempts by the Israeli extremists to abort the peace process and urges the international community to condemn all such Israeli practices and measures. We call upon Israel to implement all the relevant resolutions of the Security Council.

The indicator on the graph I mentioned earlier is sliding ever downward. Regrettably, the peace process that began in Madrid and was welcomed by Syria and other Arab countries is now deadlocked as a result of the Israeli Government's rejection of all previous efforts made and all obligations assumed over the past five years. The position of the current Israeli Government, I regret to say, is characterized by its total rejection of all the agreed elements of peace and its complete nullification of the peace process. The Israeli Government attempts to persuade the world that it is speaking about peace and that it is the very dove of peace. But we ask: What kind of peace is it talking about? It publicly states that withdrawal from the Syrian Golan is unacceptable and that its withdrawal from southern Lebanon is subject to conditions; these positions contradict the provisions of Security Council resolution 425 (1978), which calls for Israel's unconditional and immediate withdrawal from that region. Israel refuses to recognize agreements entered into by the previous Government or to fulfil its obligations — obligations that are not mere words, as the Israeli Prime Minister has called them, but that are contained in legally binding resolutions, particularly those calling for Israeli withdrawal from the Syrian Golan to the boundaries of 4 June 1967.

Peace is a balanced equation. It requires reciprocity between both parties. And that leads us to another question: What is Syria's interest — what is the interest of the Arab parties to the conflict — in seeking a peace that restores neither land nor rights to their owners? Can any just or fair person in today's world expect Syria to make peace with an Israeli Government while Syrian land remains in Israeli hands? We remain convinced that the resumption of peace talks on the basis of the Madrid Conference — that is, on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978), the principle of land for peace and the implementation of all undertakings, pledges and obligations reached with the previous Israeli Government, particularly the agreement on Israeli withdrawal from the occupied Syrian Golan to the boundaries of 4 June 1967 — is the only way in which a just and comprehensive peace in the only region can be achieved.

When Syria and other Arab countries chose peace as a strategic option, we assumed that the other party to the equation would also seriously and genuinely commit itself to the process and display the same good intentions. Syria and the Arabs are committed to that strategic option. Syria believes that the peace process must be successful, because peace will benefit all the parties in the region — Israel foremost among them — as well as all the countries of the world. It is therefore important for the

entire international community to show resolve and determination and to mobilize all its potential so that peace can triumph and all can enjoy their rights. That is how peace becomes just, for peace means justice and justice is integral to peace. If that cannot come to pass, there will be no peace, there will be only submission.

We look forward to the achievement of a just, comprehensive and lasting peace on the basis of the Madrid agreements, the implementation of legally binding international resolutions and the principle of land for peace, as well as the fulfilment of all the obligations entered into when the Government of the Labour Party held power in Israel. From this rostrum, we call upon the international community to exert its effective influence on Israel to desist its settlement policy, to refrain from expanding the settlements in the occupied Arab territories and to resume peace talks on the Syrian and Lebanese tracks, for the success of the peace process will have a positive effect on the region and on the entire world, bringing peace, security and development, which will lead to prosperity and progress for us all. Syria will always advocate peace in all its aspects and hopes that everyone will endeavour to achieve that longed-for goal with all possible determination.

Mr. Elaraby (Egypt) (*interpretation from Arabic*): When, in 1991, the city of Madrid hosted the parties to the peace process in the Middle East, in full view of the whole world and with the participation of the sponsors of the process, Egypt, as a participant in the Conference, was among the first to be convinced that making progress in the peace process between the Arab parties and Israel would be neither easy nor automatic. We expected the process to run into some problems, but we did not lose hope that a just and comprehensive peace would ultimately be achieved.

That historic Conference gave rise to comprehensive negotiating processes whose frame of reference was the relevant Security Council resolutions and the principle of the return of land for peace. These are the cardinal principles that provide the solid basis for any peace that might prevail in the Middle East. The machinery of the process took the form of numerous negotiating tracks, from a bilateral track to negotiate a withdrawal from the occupied territories, to a multilateral track to negotiate regional questions, such as disarmament, water, Palestinian refugees and the establishment of regional economic cooperation, which, from the outset, was believed to be the next logical step once peace had been secured through a just and comprehensive political settlement.

Since the very beginning, the negotiating process has never been an end in itself. The ultimate objective was and remains the establishment of a just and comprehensive peace between the Arabs and Israel in return for Israel's withdrawal from all the territories it has occupied since 1967 and the exercise by the Palestinian people of all their inalienable and legitimate national rights.

Undoubtedly, the march towards peace has registered many praiseworthy successes, particularly the numerous agreements signed by Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization in Oslo, Washington and Cairo. These agreements have given the Palestinians a degree of self-rule for the first time and enabled them to conduct and run most of their own day-to-day affairs. It is also noteworthy that the peace process led to the signing of the Treaty of Peace between Jordan and Israel in October 1994. Today, after the regrettable developments that we are now witnessing in the Middle East, Egypt believes that it must draw the attention of the international community to certain important facts that should not be overlooked during the General Assembly's consideration of the agenda item on the Middle East.

First, the backtracking by the current Israeli Government as regards the continuation of negotiations on the basis of the principles accepted by all parties and which formed the basis of the Madrid peace process has seriously damaged that very process. Ironically, the Israeli Government that started the process in Madrid was headed by the Likud Party currently in power in Israel.

Secondly, a glance at the current state of the peace process reveals a dark picture that does not inspire optimism. The Lebanese and Syrian tracks are at a complete standstill, while the Palestinian track has backslid as a result of the position of the Israeli Government, its lack of respect for its international contractual obligations, its non-implementation of the agreement on the redeployment of its forces outside the city of Al-Khalil (Hebron) and its failure to withdraw from zones B and C of the occupied Palestinian territories.

Thirdly, not satisfied with damaging the peace process, the Israeli Government adopted a policy of fait accompli in resuming the establishment of settlements and moving settlers into Palestinian territories and the Syrian Golan. It has started to build roads to connect the settlements to Israel and offered settlers attractive tax incentives to encourage them to settle in the occupied

territories. Egypt warns that, should Israel persist in these policies, it will be challenging the framework that has been agreed since the beginning of the peace process. These actions also constitute a violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War. They are also a clear contravention of the provisions of the Oslo agreement relating to the need for the parties to refrain from taking any measures that could affect negotiations and the final status. This persistence can but have dire consequences for the peace process and the future of the region. Egypt reiterates that the establishment of these settlements on the occupied Arab territories does not confer any legal backing or legitimacy on these settlements. Those that settle in them have no ownership rights and Arab negotiators have no obligation whatsoever towards them.

Fourthly, the Israeli Government is altering the demographic nature and composition of Al-Quds. None of its attempts to do so have been or will be accepted by the international community. They amount to clear sabotage of the peace process and a flagrant violation of Security Council resolutions 465 (1980) and 478 (1980), as well as of the Oslo agreement, as I mentioned earlier.

The future of Al-Quds is one of the subjects of the final status negotiations, as was agreed in Oslo. In conformity with the Fourth Geneva Convention, Israel, in its capacity as the occupying Power, is obliged to respect the city's demographic character and composition as long as its final status has not been determined through negotiations.

Fifthly, the need to resume negotiations on the Syrian and Lebanese tracks cannot be ignored. Israel is called upon to resume negotiations on both tracks as soon as possible, on the basis of the Madrid framework of reference and the relevant Security Council resolutions.

Moving from this gloomy picture on the political level to the field of regional economic cooperation, we find the Middle East/North African Economic Conference, which was held in the middle of last month, to be a landmark of great significance. It has become clear beyond the shadow of a doubt that the movement towards peace in the Middle East is an integral whole and that normal economic relations between the Arab countries and Israel cannot be established, cannot develop and cannot flourish with the stalemate of the peace process and with the continued Israeli occupation of Arab territories, whether in the West Bank, the Golan or southern Lebanon.

It has become clear that progress in the bilateral negotiations between the Arabs and Israel and the advancement of economic cooperation in the region are two sides of the same coin. Israel will therefore not be able to reap the benefits of economic cooperation in the region if it continues to insist on dealing with its neighbours on the basis of concepts of occupation, hegemony, disregard for rights and non-implementation of international obligations.

A just and comprehensive peace is the basis for the achievement of security for all parties. In this regard, Egypt continues to call for the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone. This is supported by consensus by the international community represented in this General Assembly every year. Since President Mubarak's initiative in 1990, Egypt has called for the establishment of a zone free of all weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East. Yet, most regrettably, Israel continues to refuse to begin any negotiations on limiting nuclear armaments within the multilateral working group emanating from the Madrid Conference, in addition to refusing continually to take any confidence-building measures regarding inspection of its nuclear facilities in order to prove its sincerity.

The achievement of peace in the Middle East is an objective to which all the peoples of the region, Arab and Israeli alike, look forward. The Arab Summit held last June decided that the choice of peace is an strategic Arab choice. Yet if peace is removed from its framework or rendered devoid of its real content, then it will not be the balanced, just and comprehensive peace we hope to establish in the Middle East between the Arabs and Israel.

In conclusion, I reiterate Egypt's demands that Israel desist from and reverse the negative policies it has been pursuing and that it resume the implementation of its commitments, respect its international obligations and extend the hand of peace, if peace is indeed what it seeks to achieve. Otherwise, the international community will be called upon to fully shoulder its responsibilities in this regard to prevent the peace process from slipping into a maze of dead ends.

Mr. Owada (Japan): In the light of the most recent developments in the Middle East, and in particular in the light of the events that have been taking place between the Government of Israel and the Palestinian Authority, the international community has grave concern over the prospects for the Middle East peace process. While

Chairman Arafat and Prime Minister Netanyahu, meeting in Washington, D.C., in early October, agreed to resume talks in the wake of the violence that broke out this past September in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip between Israeli security forces and Palestinians, which threatened to utterly derail the peace process, we have seen few signs of concrete progress. Indeed, particularly as one considers the stalemate over the Hebron question, one is left with the sad impression that in the present circumstances no sense of optimism would seem to be warranted.

The Government of Japan strongly hopes that the parties concerned will recognize that the ongoing peace process provides the only realistic and reasonable option for the restoration of peace and stability throughout the Middle East. It is important that the agreements that have already been reached be steadily implemented, on the basis of the relevant Security Council resolutions and the concept of land for peace. In order to contribute to that goal, Japan has been pursuing a three-pronged approach in its policy towards the Middle East. First, it has been participating actively in multilateral talks to create an environment conducive to peace. Secondly, it has been pursuing bilateral efforts, including numerous direct and intensive consultations conducted at the highest level of government, with the leaders of the parties concerned. And thirdly, it has been making financial contributions in the belief that it is important to show people in the region that the establishment of durable peace brings real dividends.

It is a considered view of Japan that the most recent outbreaks of violence in Jerusalem and other occupied territories are nothing other than a symptom of the frustration felt by the Palestinian people at the lack of the prospect for hope in their situation. While we in Japan strongly condemn acts of terrorism waged against innocent civilians by the suicide attacks of extremists in Palestine, which are aimed at sabotaging the progress made in the peace process since Madrid and Oslo, and while we also understand the resulting need of the Israeli authorities to tighten their security measures in order to protect their civilian population, it is undeniable at the same time that the closure of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip has resulted in a sharp rise in unemployment, causing great economic hardship to the Palestinian people in those territories. It has also seriously reduced the revenues available to the Palestinian Authority.

Japan understands that Israel must ensure its own national security so as to enable its people to live in peace; nevertheless, it is important that it do so in a way that will not result in depriving the Palestinian people of their right to live in peace in the region. It is in this spirit that Japan wishes to urge Israel to lift the closure without further delay, while taking measures necessary for satisfying its own legitimate security needs.

With regard to the Syrian track, the Government of Japan is concerned over the fact that the Israeli-Syrian negotiations have been suspended since last February. I wish to urge strongly that both parties make their best efforts in order to resume the negotiations as soon as possible, so that the differences that exist between their respective positions may be overcome in the interest of achieving an overall peace.

There is no need to reiterate that Japan attaches great importance to the establishment of genuine peace and stability throughout the Middle East. In its earnest desire to advance peace, and in its deep conviction that international support to facilitate the process of negotiations by the parties directly involved would be essential to expediting the peace process, Japan has participated actively in the multilateral talks on the Middle East since they were set in motion in Madrid five years ago. Thus, Japan has contributed to the progress in the Working Group on the Environment as its Chairman, as well as in the capacity of Vice-Chairman of the Working Groups on Economic Development, Water Resources and Refugees. Japan has also been cooperating with other like-minded countries in nurturing confidence among the parties concerned by supporting initiatives for the Middle East/North African Economic Conference which was recently held in Cairo.

Japan believes that while all these efforts may not be part and parcel of the direct negotiations between the parties themselves, they have proved to be extremely constructive in the sense that such developments, with their enhanced prospects for regional cooperation in the areas of environment, tourism and economic joint ventures, can serve as a catalyst for the promotion of mutual confidence among the parties and for the creation of brighter prospects for the future of regional cooperation among the parties. Japan's recent bilateral efforts through numerous direct and intensive consultations with the leaders of the parties concerned, conducted at the highest level of Government, have also contributed greatly to assisting the peace process between the parties. From this perspective, I wish to make the point that the apparent reluctance, said to have been shown by some of the parties concerned, to participate in the multilateral talks is a source of great concern to Japan.

As I suggested earlier, the international community has a responsibility to contribute to the creation of an environment that will be conducive to progress in the peace process. For this purpose, since February 1966, Japan has been dispatching contingents of its self-defence forces to the Golan Heights to participate in the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF), which has been in place in the area with the mandate of securing the peace and stability of the region for more than 20 years. The Japanese transport platoon deployed with UNDOF consists of 43 personnel from all ranks as well as two staff officers who are providing logistical support to the peacekeeping operation. This participation in UNDOF marks the fourth deployment of Japanese self-defence forces to participate in international efforts abroad. Assistance to the Palestinian people is also important in this regard. In this spirit, since 1993 Japan has contributed approximately $240 million in assistance to the Palestinians.

Let me now come to the draft resolution before us. My delegation wishes to commend the efforts of Norway, the United States and the Russian Federation in presenting the draft resolution on the Middle East peace process (A/51/L.40), of which Japan has become a sponsor. In adopting this text, the international community will reaffirm its full support for the ongoing efforts to achieve peace in the Middle East and call on all parties concerned to accelerate the negotiations. My delegation has on several occasions emphasized that, to be adopted by the General Assembly, resolutions will have to be constructive in their effects. My delegation regards the present document to be one such resolution, inasmuch as it is expected to have the effect of fostering and reinforcing the current peace process.

In closing, I should like to reiterate Japan's urgent appeal to all the parties concerned to do everything in their power to break the current stalemate in the peace process. In so doing, they will restore international confidence in the sincerity of their intentions and renew a sense of hope among the people they represent for a peaceful and secure future.

Mr. Núñez Mosquera (Cuba) (*interpretation from Spanish*): The item on the situation in the Middle East has been on the agenda of the General Assembly for years now. General Assembly resolution 50/22 A of 4 December 1995 and Security Council resolution 478 (1980) of 20 August 1980 remain particularly relevant.

Through resolution 50/22 A, the General Assembly determined that all legislative and administrative (measures and) actions taken by Israel that had altered or purported to alter the character and status of Jerusalem, in particular the so-called "Basic Law" on Jerusalem and the proclamation of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, were null and void and must be rescinded forthwith. Through resolution 478 (1980), the Security Council decided not to recognize the "Basic Law" and called upon those States that had established diplomatic missions at Jerusalem to withdraw such missions from that city.

During this fifty-first session the consideration of the item is of singular importance and significance to the United Nations, bearing in mind the particular current context of a regional peace process that is in constant change, as is the case in the Middle East.

The Palestinian people and the peoples of all occupied Arab territories are today confronting as never before a crucial moment in their history. This is because their genuine efforts to achieve a just and lasting peace in the region have in recent months met with grave and hostile incidents provoked by the occupying Power with an aggressive and dangerous policy that threatens the course of the peace process in the region. It is common knowledge that all of this is possible thanks to the support Israel continues to receive from the United States, which has never concealed its determination to veto in the Security Council any resolution that contains firm statements against Israel's conduct in the Middle East.

It is necessary to put an end to the Israeli occupation of Arab and Palestinian territories and to ensure that the letter and spirit of the provisions contained in the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements, in the Cairo Agreement, in the Israel-Palestine Interim Agreement on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, and all subsequent agreements are respected. It is also necessary to ensure compliance with the terms and stages of the peace process endorsed in those agreements.

In addition, it is necessary to ensure the greatest possible political, legal and moral support on the part of the United Nations for the cause of the Palestinian people and all the peoples of the occupied Arab territories and for the peace process in the Middle East. The question of Palestine is the core of the conflict in the Middle East and a real will to negotiate is necessary in order to achieve a just, comprehensive and lasting solution to the conflict as a whole.

Cuba reaffirms the right of the Palestinian people to have an independent State with Jerusalem as its capital and rejects measures aimed at changing the legal status and demographic composition of that city. Cuba demands the return of all the Arab territories occupied by Israel, including the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, Jerusalem, the Syrian Golan Heights and the occupied strip of southern Lebanon. Cuba demands respect for territorial integrity, sovereignty and the internationally recognized borders of the States of the region.

The Palestinian people and the peoples of all the Arab occupied territories need the General Assembly, the Security Council and the United Nations to play an effective and genuinely committed role in the peace process, on which the international community has focused its hopes.

Mr. Hasmy (Malaysia): It is indeed regrettable that because of the climate of tension and the unstable security situation engulfing the region, the Middle East — or West Asia — has remained an area that has not fully benefited from the developmental process enjoyed by many other regions of the world. Coming after a series of much heralded but short-lived peace processes which for a long time promised nothing more than perhaps a lessening of the cycle of violence and hostilities, the historic breakthrough that led to the Madrid Conference five years ago offered for the first time serious prospects for change. It spurred new and unprecedented hopes and expectations that, at long last, there were real prospects for a comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East.

Malaysia, therefore, could not but feel dismayed and seriously concerned that the policies of the new Israeli Government and its intransigent attitude have now threatened to put the entire peace process in jeopardy. My delegation, as well as others that have spoken earlier in this Assembly, dwelled at length on this during the debate on the question of Palestine — a key issue in the final resolution of the conflict in the Middle East — which ended yesterday.

It is not my intention to repeat what has been said, but to reiterate the fundamental point that has been made: if the present Israeli Government genuinely desires permanent peace in the region instead of permanent conflict, it must scrupulously honour the peace agreements that Israel has made with the Palestinian Authority. A radical departure from the course of the peace process, as the new Israeli Government seems bent on doing, will only dash these hopes and expectations yet again, thereby precipitating a new cycle of tension and warfare in the region which surely will not in anybody's interest, including Israel's.

Even as we focus on developments in the central issue of Palestine, other aspects of the Middle East issue equally merit the attention of the international community. The continued occupation of southern Lebanon by Israel is a constant reminder of the flagrant violation of Lebanon's sovereignty. Such an occupation is a continuing provocation and is, in our view, militarily indefensible, as the military occupation of Lebanon by force cannot guarantee lasting peace and security for Israel.

Yet, we witnessed earlier this year a series of brutal attacks carried out by Israel on many towns and villages in Lebanon — including the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) position in Qana — which resulted in an alarming number of civilian dead and wounded, severe damage to property and the displacement of thousands from their homes. The refugee problem that was created in the wake of these attacks has posed a serious challenge to the Lebanese Government as it grapples with the monumental tasks of rebuilding its war-ravaged economy and strengthening its political stability, which in recent years have achieved a measure of success.

Malaysia reaffirms its continued commitment to and unwavering support for Lebanon's quest for peace and security and an end to the Israeli occupation of southern Lebanon. Israel ought to have realized and accepted the fundamental truth that the key to its long-term security is not through the permanent occupation of neighbouring territories and the maintenance of a hawkish attitude towards its neighbours, but through the forging of a political compact with these neighbours. The territorial integrity of Lebanon must be an essential part of that compact.

We wholeheartedly welcomed the agreement reached between President Al-Assad and the late Prime Minister Rabin in June 1995 as an important breakthrough in resolving the problem between Syria and Israel. This was generally seen as a significant and positive development on the Syrian-Israeli peace track. Unfortunately, the hardline approach adopted by the new Israeli Government, particularly with regard to Israel's continued occupation of the Golan, has brought about an insurmountable impasse in the Syrian-Israeli peace track, thereby creating another regrettable setback in the overall Middle East peace process.

My delegation urges a resumption of the dialogue process as soon as possible, in the interest of creating an impetus towards the final resolution of the conflict. In the final analysis a permanent political settlement would necessitate the withdrawal of Israeli forces from the occupied Golan Heights, consistent with Security Council resolution 497 (1981). The sooner this fact is recognized and accepted by the Israeli Government, the brighter will be the prospects for a final resolution of the problem.

The existence of Israeli settlements in the occupied Golan Heights has also been a major stumbling block for the Syrian-Israeli peace process. The continued expansion of the settlements, which have changed the original demographic character of the area, is in violation of article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention. Israel's policy of continuing and expanding these Jewish settlements cannot but heighten suspicion and tension, thereby diminishing hopes for a lasting peace. Clearly, it is a policy designed not to assure but to provoke Syria, and therefore raises questions about Israel's real intentions and motivations in the region. My delegation strongly urges the Israeli Government to abandon this provocative and aggressive policy and to desist from building new settlements in the occupied Golan Heights in its efforts to create new realities on the ground.

On a more positive note, Malaysia welcomes the agreements reached between Jordan and Israel, which have led to the restoration of peace and the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries. This has provided a much needed positive environment conducive to the two countries devoting efforts and resources to development needs. This is indeed an encouraging development, one which Malaysia sincerely hopes will serve as a catalyst in generating much needed momentum for further progress in the peace process in the Middle East. For it is only through the resumption of talks based on mutual confidence and a spirit of accommodation that a comprehensive, just and lasting solution to the overall Arab-Israeli conflict can be achieved.

Malaysia has consistently called for a just and comprehensive solution to the Middle East conflict that would bring peace, security and stability to all the countries in the region, on the basis of the relevant Security Council resolutions; a just, lasting and comprehensive settlement that would entail the complete withdrawal of Israel from all occupied Palestinian territories, the occupied Syrian Golan Heights and the occupied Lebanese territories, on the basis of the principle of land for peace.

Clearly, Israel must make a choice, whether it wants permanent peace or permanent hostility and warfare with its neighbours. If it desires peace, as it has often professed, then it will have to abandon its current intransigent attitudes and policies. It will have to replace them with approaches that will inspire hope and confidence rather than frustration and despair.

Mr. Kovanda (Czech Republic): The Czech Republic enjoys traditional friendships in the Middle East, lively economic contacts with Arab States, and a very specific relationship with Israel. It naturally ranks among the staunch believers in the need to resume and continue the Middle East peace process.

The crucial task at this point is the timely implementation of existing arrangements: to complete the first stage of Israeli troop withdrawal, especially from Hebron, and to release Palestinian prisoners. Further steps should be taken to relieve the plight of Palestinians: removing road blocks, enabling safe passage between Gaza and the West Bank, and eliminating obstacles to economic assistance and to implementing infrastructure-related projects.

The basic principles for a successful outcome are embodied in Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978). The focal points — Palestinian self-determination in all its aspects and the land-for-peace principle — are indispensable to a just, comprehensive and enduring peace.

We strongly condemn all acts frustrating the international effort peacefully to resolve the Middle East conflict. Terrorism represents a particularly great threat to peace. It is an unacceptable method of political struggle. It has shaken the very foundations of the Middle East processes and has damaged the interests of the young Palestinian Authority. The Czech Republic condemned in the strongest terms the wave of terrorism that affected Israel in February and March 1996.

This past September, when violence erupted once again in Jerusalem, on the West Bank and in the Gaza Strip, there was a feeling of genuine outrage in the Czech Republic. Its victims were deeply mourned. Of course, such incidents owe much to the prevailing atmosphere of frustration and irritation and to the feeling that the peace talks are deadlocked. It is hoped that the future will show that the root cause really is the absence of visible political results.

It is in the interest of all of us that the peace process be restarted and that all countries concerned begin to participate as soon as possible. That applies especially to Syria and Lebanon, but also to Iran and even Iraq. We will continue to work for the opening of talks between Israel and Syria and between Israel and Lebanon; the territorial integrity, independence and sovereignty of Lebanon must of course be respected.

Security and stability in the Gulf are high on our list of priorities as well. This perspective informs our analysis of developments relating to Iraq, which focuses mainly on two aspects: first, the need to respect that country's territorial integrity and borders, and second, the need to speed up the implementation of the appropriate Security Council resolutions as a prerequisite for lifting sanctions. Creating the appropriate conditions for the full and speedy implementation of Security Council resolution 986 (1995) by the Iraqi Government is of particular importance.

The Czech Republic is committed to helping to strengthen the peace process and to enhancing trust among its participants. Since May 1996, it has actively participated in the multilateral negotiations as a member of the Regional Economic Development Working Group and of the Working Group on Water Resources. As the only post-communist European country to have become a donor State (at the conference of donor States on 10 January 1996 in Paris), the Czech Republic has pledged some $3 million for electrification of the Tubas region on the West Bank over the years 1995-1997. Czech assistance may well continue even after the project is completed. On 30 April 1996, during the Israeli "Grapes of Wrath" operation in south Lebanon, the Czech Republic responded to the call from the Security Council by donating CK 3 million to aid the State of Lebanon.

That has been our modest yet concrete contribution to the international effort to resolve the Middle East conflict and to alleviate the plight of the local population. Let me stress once more that it is in our interest that the Middle East process be pursued to a successful conclusion. For Israel, Palestinians and all their neighbours, peace talks are the only hopeful avenue to security and peace. Together with the guarantors of the peace process, the Czech Republic hopes to see Israel and its neighbours enjoy secure, internationally recognized and guaranteed borders and the Palestinians enjoy full respect for their legal rights.

Mr. Ka (Senegal) (*interpretation from French*): The enormous progress attained in the past five years within the framework of the Madrid Peace Conference kindled in the Middle East and throughout the international community the hope of a new era of peace, reconciliation and cooperation in the region.

It must be recognized that that positive trend, achieved at the cost of considerable sacrifice, may be dangerously compromised by reverting to practices that in the past have led to nothing but violence and destruction. Indeed, the prolonged closure of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, the isolation of the Arab quarter of Jerusalem, the resumption of the policy of confiscating Arab lands, the establishment and extension of settlements, acts of violence by armed settlers, constant lack of security on road links between the autonomous areas, acts of intimidation and punitive expeditions, the continuing detention of thousands of Palestinian prisoners and the delay in the withdrawal of Israel forces from Hebron and other areas on the West Bank are all serious violations of the peace accords.

In addition, they are responsible for heightened tension which may once again plunge the region into a cycle of uncontrolled violence. The opening of the archaeological tunnel in eastern Jerusalem has provided proof of the counterproductive nature of those policies.

On 28 September, the Security Council, speaking for the international community as a whole, expressed its deep concern at the tragic events that occurred at Jerusalem, Nablus, Ramallah, Bethlehem and the Gaza Strip and called for the cessation of acts that had resulted in the aggravation of the situation and had negative implications for the peace process.

That dangerous situation, which we believed to be behind us, has strengthened our conviction that there is no other way to achieve peace, security and stability in the region than through negotiation and the implementation of the accords freely entered into by the parties.

We emphasize the question of Palestine because we share the international community's conviction that it is at the very heart of the Middle East conflict and nothing lasting can be achieved until a settlement has been reached in accordance with international legitimacy established in the framework of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973). It is therefore urgent to restore the climate of partnership on a basis of equality and mutual trust that made it possible for the peace negotiations to effect a qualitative change in relations among the various actors in the region.

The dawning in the Middle East and the new climate in Palestinian-Israeli relations quickly had a positive impact by breathing fresh life into the region, and as a result Israel and Jordan have established formal diplomatic relations and Syria and Israel have held several talks on substantive issues relating to the occupied Syrian Golan.

This climate has also given us reason to hope that Lebanese-Israeli talks will be initiated on the basis of Security Council resolution 425 (1978).

At this critical juncture for the future of the region, we reiterate, together will all peace-loving and justice-loving countries, our appeal for the rapid resumption of the peace process and the implementation of the agreements concluded. As the President of the Republic of Senegal, Mr. Abdou Diouf, stressed in the message that he sent to commemorate the day of solidarity with the Palestinian people on 29 November 1996,

> "Today, more than ever, it is incumbent upon the sponsors of the peace process and the international community as a whole to redouble their efforts to preserve what has already been achieved and the hopes for peace that the Madrid initiative kindled in the hearts of the overwhelming majority of the people of the region and throughout the world."

The task that remains to be accomplished is, without doubt, huge, especially when we come to tackle the crucial stage of settling the sensitive final status issues. It is equally certain, however, that, if we are driven by the same faith and sense of history shown by the courageous leaders who initiated the Madrid process, there can be no insurmountable obstacle on the road to peace.

The second Middle East/North African Economic Summit, held at Amman, Jordan, in October 1995, and the one that took place recently in Cairo, demonstrated that, when peace is established once and for all, that part of the world is guaranteed a future of progress and prosperity. It is therefore up to all of us to work together, unremittingly, to maintain the momentum of the peace process by continuing to provide constantly renewed support to all those in the region who have opted for a firm commitment to the difficult path to peace. This peace, which we so earnestly desire, can be lasting only if it ensures for the Palestinian people the restoration and full exercise of its national legitimate rights.

Mr. Petrella (Argentina) (*interpretation from Spanish*): We are participating at this stage of the debate in order to enjoy the opportunity to hear and reflect on the comments of the speakers who have preceded us. We approach this item with great respect. We sincerely believe that, with the conclusion of the cold war era, the conflict in the Middle East is the last great conflict that remains to be resolved. It is a great conflict because it contains all the elements needed to ignite the flame of violence and, in one way or another, it makes all of us feel involved.

However, a preliminary review of the comments that we have heard gives us reason to hope. The negotiating process has not stopped; it is continuing, although, of course, it should move faster. What, then, are the specific additional elements that enable us to feel optimistic?

The first is the end of the cold war. Clashes between extraregional hegemonic interests no longer exist — that obsessive characteristic of international life is a thing of the past. There is no room for extreme positions, which only bring about isolation and condemnation.

The second element is the indisputable and constant progress of democracy, which, together with the international promotion of human rights, transforms all peoples into participants in these vital negotiations. Thus, no secret agreements can take place behind the back of public opinion. The prospect of peace is a hope that transcends all boundaries.

Another important element is the need for improved opportunities for trade and cooperation among all the peoples of the region. This was made clear at the Middle East/North African Economic Summit, held in 1994 in Casablanca, Morocco, and was reaffirmed by the Summits of Amman, Jordan, in 1995, and Cairo, Egypt, in November 1996. All of these gatherings reflect a reality and a regional need that only now can be fulfilled.

Lastly, another vital factor is the fact that we have a negotiating mechanism in place. Thanks to the initiatives developed here at the United Nations by several Secretaries-General, the determination of Norway and the tireless diplomatic efforts of several States, it was possible to convene the Madrid Conference of October 1991 on the basis of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) and the 1993 meeting leading to the Washington Declaration of Principles, which was held under the auspices of President Clinton. On the basis of these instruments, and encouraged by a spirit of peace,

Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization, in Cairo on 4 May 1994, signed the Agreement on the Gaza Strip and the Jericho Area and, subsequently, other agreements of similar importance.

We do not believe that we should, at this specific time, indicate to the parties a particular course of action. However, we believe that the efforts of so many years must not be squandered and that the principles of the various Security Council resolutions must be respected. The peace efforts and the will to negotiate, reflected in the signing of these documents, must not be checked, but must instead be deepened and gain momentum. We must move beyond the current difficult moment and enter a stage that, on the basis of mutual commitments, will allow the parties to enjoy tangible achievements. The dialogue between Syria and Israel would seem to be indispensable in this context.

Our comments reflect only a genuine desire to protect peace and encourage the parties to put an end to this last great conflict. To a large extent, this desire results from the influence of the Jewish and Arab communities in Argentina, as both are founding communities of our nation. However, it is also a result of the fact that Argentina has been involved in every one of the great steps taken in the United Nations.

Ever since the adoption of General Assembly resolution 181 (II), this item has been of constant concern to us, as reflected in our support for Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978) and for the efforts of successive Secretaries-General to convene a peace conference on the Middle East.

That is why we also participated in the Casablanca, Amman and Cairo Summits on economic and social development and are contributing to the "White Helmets" initiative through a series of urban planning, sports training and animal health projects being implemented in the Gaza Strip.

As we participate once again in this debate on the Middle East, on the threshold of what can only be a genuine peace, we believe that it is necessary to recall those in the United Nations who have made individual efforts to mediate peace in the Middle East: Bernadotte, Bunche and Jarring — two Swedes and one American, who best represent the spirit of realism and commitment that must guide the parties today.

Mr. Butler (Australia): This Assembly takes up its agenda item on the situation in the Middle East at a testing and troubled time for the Middle East peace negotiations. The succession of historic agreements — which began with the Madrid Peace Conference in October 1991 and was followed by the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements by Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), signed in Washington in September 1993, and the signing of the Israel-Palestine Interim Agreement on the West Bank and Gaza Strip in September 1995 — has laid a foundation for a settlement to a dispute which has bitterly divided Israel and its Arab neighbours for so long and for too long has deprived the people of the region of peace, security and prosperity.

This year began with the successful conduct of the elections for the Palestinian Council and the Palestinian National Authority. Australia is proud to have assisted that process. But other developments followed: the terrorist attacks in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv; the fighting in southern Lebanon in April; the Israeli elections in May; the Lebanese elections; the fighting following the opening of the Jerusalem tunnel; the Cairo conference. All of these events made an impact on an inevitably difficult situation. Today, nearing the end of the year, we find ourselves faced again with frustrations, with outbreaks of violence, with suspicions and resentments and with pent-up hostilities.

We have long thought that the peace process offers the only viable chance for securing a durable and just peace in which the people of the region can live together. The established processes for direct talks and for systematic negotiations serve the interests of all the parties.

For these reasons, my Government calls on all the parties to move forward with the peace process, to honour the obligations and commitments they have made, including on redeployment in Hebron and the commencement of substantive talks on final status issues. All parties must now recommit themselves to the search for a peaceful resolution of their differences. They must resume direct dialogue. The promise to negotiate solutions was given. Those negotiations must not be stalled or avoided. There is a shared responsibility to move the negotiations forward as far and as quickly as possible.

Australia's long-standing policy in the Middle East is based on a fundamental and immutable commitment to Israel's right to exist within secure and recognized boundaries. The right of the Palestinian people to self-

determination is also a fundamental principle. No one other than the parties themselves can or should seek to prejudge or to prescribe the outcome of negotiations between the parties on the specific implementation of these rights.

Australia supports a comprehensive solution to the Middle East dispute based on the principle of land for peace and on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973). To follow up on those resolutions, to complement and to fulfil them, we fully support the Madrid and Oslo agreements and the negotiating framework established under them.

We welcomed the successful convening and management of the Middle East/North African Economic Summit, held in Cairo last month, as a means of enhancing economic development in the region. The conduct of that meeting by President Mubarak and his ministers was a model of the sort of reasonable and common sense approach which could be applied to other regional challenges. President Mubarak looked to the future, not to the past. He considered how best to improve the welfare and quality of life of ordinary citizens throughout the Middle East. He talked about how best to face problems together, how best to find solutions together, how to enlist the active support of other regions of the world for the Middle East. We warmly commend and endorse his approach.

Given the importance of providing international economic support and practical assistance to the Palestinian National Authority, Australia has committed more than $A20 million in connection with the implementation of the Oslo accords. These funds are being spent principally on development activities crucial to the Palestinian people in recognition of their urgent needs. We are undertaking projects in such fields as education and training, health, legal infrastructure, water resources and income generation.

Australia has also been pleased to participate in the multilateral track of the peace process. We have been particularly involved in the working groups on arms control and regional security and on water resources. These are both areas in which Australia has demonstrated experience and expertise and in which we judge we are able to make a contribution to the future stability and prosperity of the region. Australia has also demonstrated its commitment to the cause of peace in the Middle East by its significant ongoing contribution to the Multinational Force and Observers in the Sinai, the commander of which is currently an Australian.

Recalling the tragic events in southern Lebanon in April, we urge Israel, Syria and Lebanon to redouble their efforts to achieve a peace settlement based on the early implementation of Security Council resolution 425 (1978). Australia fully supported the conclusion of the Taif Agreement in 1989 and we express our hope that it will be fully implemented. We welcome the peaceful, successful conclusion of Lebanon's second national elections since the end of the civil war. We think that those elections and the reconstruction programme to which the Lebanese Government has recommitted itself provide an excellent foundation for the peaceful revival of the Lebanese economy.

Australia will continue to encourage all States of the region to work constructively towards the objective of achieving a zone free of all weapons of mass destruction. The achievement of that objective would provide an important basis for the enhancement of regional security. We urge all Middle East States which have not yet done so to adhere to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, particularly those which operate unsafeguarded nuclear facilities, and all Parties to that Treaty to abide strictly by their non-proliferation obligations. We are pleased that the most recently concluded arms control instrument — the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty — has already been signed by a significant number of Middle East States and we encourage all other regional States to follow suit.

Equally, universal adherence by States to both the Chemical and the Biological Weapons Conventions is critical and would make an important contribution to the security of the region.

Australia has been deeply concerned by the suffering the Iraqi people have endured in recent years. The responsibility for the welfare of the Iraqi people, or indeed its absence, rests with the Government of Iraq. We welcome Iraq's recent agreement to the terms of implementation of Security Council resolution 986 (1995), which will go some way towards providing basic necessities for the Iraqi people. We look forward to the Iraqi Government's final and full compliance with all mandatory Security Council resolutions.

We again urge Iraq to cooperate fully with the Special Commission. It is only by providing such cooperation that Iraq can receive certification acceptable to the international community that it is no longer building, testing, storing or hiding the worst kinds of weapons of mass destruction.

International support for negotiations, including that of Australia, has not changed. Australia urges the parties to build constructively on the foundations they themselves have laid; pursue direct talks; resolve the immediate stumbling blocks; make progress on a broader front; and, in so doing, regain and reinforce the habit of working productively together.

In conclusion, I reiterate that Australia has demonstrated a long-standing commitment to help, in constructive and practical ways, to achieve the goals of stability, prosperity and enduring peace in the Middle East region. We will continue in that commitment as far as proves to be practicable.

The Acting President: In accordance with General Assembly resolutions 3237 (XXIX) of 22 November 1974 and 43/177 of 15 December 1988, I now call on the Permanent Observer of Palestine.

Mr. Al-Kidwa (Palestine) (*interpretation from Arabic*): The peace process in the Middle East began with the Madrid Peace Conference in 1991, which was held on the basis of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973). At the core of these resolutions was the principle of land for peace. This process gained additional momentum with the historical turning point of mutual recognition between the Palestine Liberation Organization and Israel, the signing of the Declaration of Principles by both parties in 1993 and the subsequent implementation agreements. These were followed by the Treaty of Peace between Israel and Jordan, in addition to a number of other positive developments that began to change the face of the Middle East and pointed to a promising future for the region.

Unfortunately, this positive momentum has recently stalled. Events have backslid towards confrontation and tension. A serious threat now hovers over the process as a whole. This is a result of the policies pursued by the Government of Mr. Netanyahu in Israel, beginning with the general policies of his Government and ending with its attempt to retreat from the agreement on the redeployment of Israeli troops from Hebron.

The most dangerous act of that Government has been its attempt to retreat from the foundation of the peace process and to reject the principle of land for peace. It resumed its colonialist settlement of the occupied Palestinian territories, including Jerusalem, then tried to circumvent all the agreements reached between the Palestinian and Israeli parties and to strip them of their content.

The right way to put the peace process back on track and to build on the achievements already attained would be full commitment to and prompt implementation of all agreements reached. Israel must refrain from creating new facts on the ground and from taking measures that are harmful to the Palestinians, such as the blockades imposed on their land and people.

The Syrian track could be set on course by a resumption of negotiations between the Syrian and Israeli parties at the point at which they stopped and by the respect of both parties for the understandings between them. We confirm here the necessity of a full Israeli withdrawal from the Syrian Arab Golan.

The Lebanese track could be pursued by resuming negotiations with a view to the prompt implementation of Security Council resolution 425 (1978), which stipulates a full Israeli withdrawal from all Lebanese territories. We reiterate Lebanon's right to compensation for the crimes perpetrated against it in the course of Operation "Grapes of Wrath".

The peace process includes, *inter alia*, the negotiations of multilateral committees aimed at accelerating the process of change in the Middle East. It also includes the holding of annual economic conferences aimed at enhancing economic cooperation between all parties in the region and at improving their economies.

Once again, given the position and policies of the present Israeli Government and the deteriorating situation on the ground, this aspect of the peace process will be unable to continue. The Palestinian side has suspended its participation in multilateral committees, except for the Committee on Refugees. As far as regional economic cooperation goes, it is impossible for such cooperation to move forward so long as the Palestinian economy remains devastated by Israeli policies. It is simply not possible for practical political and economic reasons. The Government of Israel must clearly understand that it cannot enjoy the positive aspects of peace without implementing its obligations vis-à-vis that peace.

Arab national security is of central importance. At a time when we have agreed to give priority to the Israeli side with regard to protecting its security and expressed our readiness to work for security in the region in general, we cannot at the same time agree that Israel's

security should be ensured at the expense of Palestinian security or, more broadly, Arab national security. We seek a logical balance between the interests of all the parties concerned. In this connection, we reiterate our rejection of military blocs in the region. We also reject Israel's acquisition of weapons of mass destruction, particularly nuclear weapons.

In our small region, the presence of nuclear reactors in Israel that are not subject to International Atomic Energy Agency safeguards represents a threat to all peoples of the region, as does, indeed, the presence of nuclear weaponry, with all its dangerous ramifications. We call upon the international community to demonstrate the determination necessary to persuade Israel to accede to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and to assist all parties in creating a region free from all weapons of mass destruction, including nuclear weapons.

The situation in the Arab Gulf region continues to pose problems. In this connection, we reiterate the need to respect the security, stability and territorial integrity of all countries of the Gulf region. We refer in particular to the necessity for non-interference in the internal affairs of the State of Bahrain and of recognizing the sovereignty of the United Arab Emirates over the three islands of Abu Musa and the Lesser and Greater Tunbs.

As for Iraq, we look forward to an end to the suffering of its population. We reiterate our adherence to Iraq's unity, territorial integrity and sovereignty. We hope that the implementation of Security Council resolution 986 (1995) will be a step towards the implementation of other relevant resolutions of the Council and that normal relations will be restored between that fraternal country and the international community as a whole.

We also look forward to the establishment of normal relations between the Islamic Republic of Iran and all its Arab neighbours, as well as between Iran and the Palestinians.

With regard to fraternal Yemen, we support its efforts peacefully to regain its sovereignty over the Red Sea islands of Hanish.

As for the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, we call for an end to the sanctions imposed upon it and for a solution to the current crisis on the basis of initiatives taken by the League of Arab States and the Organization of African Unity.

The Arab citizen is now looking to the Security Council, which is imposing full or partial sanctions solely on three Arab countries and upon no others, in spite of countless violations of international law elsewhere in the world. That citizen cannot but wonder about the justification and criteria for the continuation of such sanctions. We look forward to a solution to all the problems facing the Arab countries, based on our faith in joint Arab action and on the need to preserve Arab interests. That cannot but contribute effectively to building a new Middle East and achieving successful and effective partnership in the Mediterranean region, which, we hope, will become a true sea of peace and prosperity. In this connection, I commend the efforts that have been made in this sphere by the Arab countries and their attempts to find solutions to the question of the Middle East as a whole, in particular the fraternal Arab Republic of Egypt and the countries of the Arab Maghreb Union.

In spite of the deteriorating situation in the Middle East and the difficulties facing the peace process there, we continue to be committed to that process. We hope that it will restore the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, including their right to self-determination and the establishment of an independent State with its capital Al-Quds Al-Sharif. We also hope that that will lead to the establishment of a lasting, just and comprehensive peace throughout the Middle East region.

The Acting President (*interpretation from Spanish*): We have heard the last speaker in the debate for this meeting.

A number of delegations have asked to speak in exercise of the right of reply. I remind members that, in accordance with decision 34/401, statements in exercise of the right of reply shall be limited to 10 minutes for the first intervention and to five minutes for the second, and should be made by delegations from their seats.

Mr. Abou-Hadid (Syrian Arab Republic) (*interpretation from Arabic*): This morning in the Assembly, we heard a statement by the Israeli representative that contained the usual fabrications and false claims at which the Israeli Government excels on a daily basis. In this case, it concerned a quotation attributed to our Ambassador to Egypt and the Arab League and a speech he made at the University of Alexandria in Egypt.

This is not the first time that the media have altered the words of a political official. The Israeli representative

should have mentioned the correction published the following day, 30 November, by the newspapers *Al-Ahram* and *Al Wafd*, in which the Syrian Ambassador denied the statements attributed to him and indicated the alteration of the substance of his lecture at the University of Alexandria. The Israeli representative also ignored the Ambassador's actual words in his lecture, which were to the effect that Syria was the first State at the Paris Conference to call for a ban on all weapons of mass destruction, especially the most dangerous of them: nuclear weapons.

Syria has made its strategic choice. That choice is peace. It is also the Arab choice. The Ambassador of Syria also made it clear that a just and comprehensive peace, within the Madrid frame of reference and based on the principle of land for peace, is achievable if Israel responds to international and Arab demands and proceeds to implement the resolutions of international legality. There is no need to refer here to the Ambassador of Syria's remarks on Israel's use of nuclear weapons. He did state that no Arab State possesses weapons of mass destruction. Arabs threaten no one with such weapons. All the Arab States in the region have acceded to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. Israel has not.

It is Israel's possession of weapons of mass destruction — and the most lethal of them, as various international sources have noted when confirming Israel's possession of more than 200 nuclear missiles — that poses a threat to peace and security in the Middle East, the Mediterranean region and Europe.

Since the beginning of 1994, Syria has declared repeatedly, in this Hall, that its strategic choice is a just and comprehensive peace. It has declared its readiness to resume the peace process within the framework of the Madrid Conference and according to its principles, which are based on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1983) and 425 (1978) and the principle of land for peace, and to resume the peace talks from the point at which they stopped under the previous Israeli Government. Syria challenges the Israeli Government to accept these premises, to resume to the negotiations that started after the Madrid Conference in 1991 and to implement the commitment made by Israel to withdraw to the border of 4 June 1967.

In his statement, the Israeli representative also used the word "terrorism", knowing full well that Israel was the first to introduce terrorism in the region. President Hafez Al-Assad, in a televised interview on this subject, said that the people concerned with this question were the hundreds of thousands of people in Syria who had been uprooted from their homes and their homeland, some in 1948 and some in 1967. Forced to go to the Arab States adjacent to Palestine, they have been living, and continue to live, as displaced persons, struggling to establish their homeland in order to feel that they are a people no different from the other peoples of the world.

The President added that they had not gone to Syria of their own free will; they had been forced out of their homes. What were Syria, Lebanon or Jordan, the countries with the largest concentrations of such displaced persons, supposed to do? Throw them in the sea? Could the displaced persons be expected not to feel nostalgic about their countries, not to feel like all other peoples that love their homeland, of dignity and freedom in their own land and the need to return to it? Who could blame them if they struggled for the values cherished by and spoken about by all the peoples of the world?

Is it possible, he asked, to speak about human rights in one country while people who were displaced and uprooted from their countries decades ago and are still struggling to return to their homes are considered terrorists or criminals? Despite their suffering, those people living in Syria did not engage in any acts of violence from inside that country. If they did carry out any such acts, they did so from Palestine and southern Lebanon, not Syria. They were not the ones who carried out the actions inside the occupied Palestinian territories, he said, adding that they deserved to be called freedom fighters, not terrorists, because they were resisting the occupation of the Arab territories.

The song of the devil that Israel constantly sings makes it the last country to be entitled to speak of terrorism, particularly since the continued occupation by Israel of the Arab territories is the highest form of terrorism. A few moments ago, in the Assembly, representatives heard the Ambassador of Lebanon reviewing Israel's record, which is replete with acts of terrorism. Here, we would like to reaffirm that the massacres perpetrated by Israel in Palestinian territory and southern Lebanon, and even on the territory of Lebanon proper, represent the highest form of terrorism. Israel's persistence in carrying out its daily terrorist practices, whether in the occupied Palestinian territories, in the Lebanese territories or in the occupied Syrian Golan, is the clearest evidence of its lack of desire to live in peace with its Arab neighbours.

Mr. Danesh-Yazdi (Islamic Republic of Iran): Today the representative of the Israeli regime made baseless allegations against my country in his statement. It is quite clear that the sole purpose of this disinformation campaign is to divert the attention of the international community from the continued occupation of southern Lebanon by Israel. We would like to reiterate our position and our humanitarian and moral support for the Lebanese people. Those people who are fighting the foreign occupation are exercising their legitimate rights, which are recognized by international law. By no means can they be labelled terrorists. The people of southern Lebanon are entitled to struggle for the right to liberate their homeland.

Mr. Moubarak (Lebanon) (*interpretation from Arabic*): This morning we heard a statement by the representative of the Israeli forces that are occupying southern Lebanon that described those people resisting the occupation of their territory as terrorists simply because they refuse to bow to Israeli oppression and because they are committed to freedom and to the liberation of their territory from these atrocities.

Does this representative, who wears the gloves of death, believe that he has hoodwinked us? Does he believe that the world does not see how, day by day, because of weapons of mass destruction, the inviolability of our territory and our independence and sovereignty are jeopardized? How can he so arrogantly violate General Assembly resolutions and those that are internationally binding? What kind of history will we be teaching our children when they read that a representative of an independent State of this international Organization one day showed complete disdain for the United Nations and the resolutions of the Security Council, the General Assembly and the Commission on Human Rights?

That same representative, while placing himself above the law, dares to invoke law and legality. How can he describe as terrorists those who are resisting the unjust force that has been used against their country? Is occupation by force not the very essence of terrorism? Can he believe that he is convincing the Assembly when he says that the aggression against the territory of our occupied country is an act of terrorism, whereas the bombardment of innocent people and their houses, their schools, their hospitals and their public utilities qualifies as self-defence? How can we allow the Israeli occupier to invoke the right to self-defence?

We cannot, on the eve of the twenty-first century, accept this type of logic in this forum, as all the peoples of the world have placed their hope in our Organization's ability to achieve international peace, security and stability. The Israeli forces' bombing of the United Nations headquarters in Qana, killed dozens of innocent people, including women, children and old people. Ambulances were bombed, as were other private vehicles that were fleeing the tanks. Houses were destroyed with people still in them; and hundreds of thousands of people were forced to migrate. This is not a figment of our imagination.

This took place before our very eyes. We witnessed the destruction of dozens of towns, power plants, bridges, schools and hospitals. Can this be considered self-defence, while an attack against a military vehicle containing Israeli soldiers, who are occupying our territory, is regarded as an act of terrorism? What kind of logic is this, and how long are we going to listen to such heretical talk?

The fact is that the continuing Israeli occupation is perpetuating this vicious circle of violence and destruction. The occupation must come to an end. The pretext of security zones is doomed to failure. Peace can be achieved only on the basis of respect for international law. The international community has for years been sending its own soldiers to keep the peace in our country.

My Government is committed to achieving peace and to assuming all of its responsibilities under international law when the Israeli occupation comes to an end. Why is this occupation continuing? Though they refuse to respect our position and heed our wisdom, how long can they go on ignoring the will of others? It is high time for all of us to recognize that a genuine peace can be established only on a just basis, and that this just basis cannot be achieved as long as the principles of international law are not respected.

Programme of work

The Acting President (*interpretation from Spanish*): I should like to inform members that on Thursday, 5 December, in the afternoon, the General Assembly will resume consideration of agenda item 21, "Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance", with a view to taking action on some of the draft resolutions submitted under that item.

On Friday, 6 December, in the afternoon, the General Assembly will resume its consideration of agenda

item 41, entitled "Support by the United Nations system of the efforts of Governments to promote and consolidate new or restored democracies", and agenda item 44, entitled "Implementation of the United Nations New Agenda for the Development of Africa in the 1990s", also with a view to taking action on the draft resolutions submitted under these two items. In the same afternoon, the General Assembly will also take up agenda item 162, entitled "Proclamation of 7 December as International Civil Aviation Day".

On Tuesday, 10 December, in the afternoon, the General Assembly will consider the reports of the First Committee.

I should also like to inform members that the General Committee will meet on Friday, 6 December 1996, at 9.30 a.m. in Conference Room 4 to consider a request by a number of countries for the inclusion in the agenda of the current session of the Assembly of an additional item entitled "Observer status for the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea", contained in document A/51/234 and Add.1.

The meeting rose at 6.05 p.m.